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Summary record of the 9th meeting
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Chairman: Mrs. Martínez (Vice-Chairperson) ..... (Ecuador)

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In the absence of Mr. Galuška (Czech Republic), Mrs. Martinez (Ecuador), Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 109: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/54/3, 38/Rev.1(Suppl.), 98, A/54/123-E/1999/66, A/54/124, A/54/156-E/1999/102, A/54/156/Add.1-E/1999/102/Add.1, A/54/224, 225, 341, 342, 352, 405)

Agenda item 110: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (*continued*) (A/54/124, 264, 354)

1. **Ms. Vienravi** (Thailand) emphasized the long-standing contribution of women to Thailand's development. While Thai women had assumed new roles and responsibilities in modern-day society, including enhanced participation in the political and economic fields, women in Thailand remained under-represented. It was her Government's aspiration to forge a solid partnership between men and women with a view to creating a society conducive to the realization of individual potential regardless of gender.

2. Thailand was a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women and wholeheartedly welcomed the adoption of the Optional Protocol, which it hoped to sign on Human Rights Day (10 December).

3. Her Government attached particular importance to national and regional efforts to combat the trafficking in women and children. The Office of the National Commission on Women's Affairs (ONCWA) coordinated efforts in that endeavour in cooperation with non-governmental organizations and the international community. Her delegation was pleased to announce that recently promulgated legislation criminalized traffickers while acknowledging trafficked persons as victims. Moreover, as part of follow-up to the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children held in Stockholm in 1996, ONCWA had established the competent institutional mechanisms and drafted a rule of procedure to serve as a standard in the treatment of victims by government authorities and non-governmental organizations. A memorandum of understanding was currently being drafted to foster cross-border cooperation on the issue between Thailand and Cambodia; it was to be hoped that such cooperation would be expanded throughout the region.

4. The region was working towards full implementation of relevant international instruments concerning women and children and was intensifying efforts to enhance the capacity of disadvantaged women to participate in the labour market on an equal basis.

5. Thailand was committed to cooperating with the international community in the advancement of women and was in favour of building upon the foundations laid out at the Fourth World Conference on Women. In that connection, Thailand supported consideration of the twelve critical areas of concern contained in the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as consideration of the four cross-cutting themes proposed for further action. Her delegation considered the theme of "human security and social protection" to be particularly relevant to the item.

6. **Ms. Ahmed** (Sudan) said that the advancement of women could best be achieved within a comprehensive framework tailored to suit each country's special characteristics. The principle of justice guided the Sudan's policy; accordingly, Sudanese women played an effective role in all aspects of life, and, given access to education and training, enjoyed equality with men with regard to work, pay and political participation. Women's rights and responsibilities were fully recognized in the current 10-year comprehensive national strategy, and the Permanent Constitution of 1998 affirmed that all Sudanese people were equal with regard to rights and responsibilities.

7. The Sudan had been one of the first States to respond to the recommendations made by the world conferences on women, and had established women's units in the relevant ministries and in all administrative districts. Her country was making every effort to implement the relevant General Assembly resolutions and the outcome of the Beijing Conference. An increasing number of non-governmental organizations, and, in particular, women's organizations, played an important part in the eradication of illiteracy and of harmful customary practices, the alleviation of poverty, and in the provision of care for children, families, and vulnerable sectors of society, including the disabled and elderly.

8. However, the lack of foreign cooperation, the inadequacy of social services and the lack of infrastructure in the areas affected by the war in the south made it difficult for the Sudan to implement women-related programmes. More than 3 million people, of whom 70 per cent were women and children, had been displaced in the south. Furthermore, the United States attack on the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory in August 1998 had deprived women and children of many vital medicines. The unjustified use of force against civilian targets and, in particular, against those that supplied the basic needs of women and children,

was a flagrant violation of international law. It also violated such human rights as the right to life and health.

9. The outcome of the Beijing Conference was the first step towards empowering women in all sectors of society. In view of the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly, it was important to review and evaluate that outcome and to deal with the problems that were obstructing its implementation, in developing countries in particular. Donor countries must honour their obligations with respect to official development aid, reduction of the debt burden and strengthening the partnership between North and South.

10. **Mr. Valdivieso** (Colombia) said that, on the basis of the Convention and of the Optional Protocol, and with the involvement of Governments, civil society, and regional and international organizations at the special session of the General Assembly, it should be possible to identify the way forward towards complete gender equality in the new millennium.

11. Colombia had made significant progress in the advancement of women and gender equality, but much remained to be done. In 1999, it had submitted its fourth periodic report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The recommendations made by that Committee drew attention to some shortcomings which needed to be overcome, but also provided support to Colombia. His delegation recommended that countries which had not yet done so should endeavour to submit their periodic reports in the interest of accelerating progress towards the agreed goals.

12. His Government was deeply concerned about the situation of women in rural areas. The report of the Secretary-General (A/54/123) showed that rural women tended to be discriminated against in terms of access to resources and services, and, despite their enormous contribution to agricultural production, were becoming increasingly impoverished. The deteriorating situation of rural women was closely linked with accelerated globalization, the growing interdependence of States, and the new priorities which they demanded of Governments. Colombia had made a commitment to building gender equality beginning at the rural level. In the long term, it would be necessary to ensure a sustainable development model, combining social justice, redistribution of resources and gender equality.

13. His Government acknowledged the work carried out by the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and supported the efforts to strengthen it financially and consolidate it administratively. It was not possible to abandon an institution which, in its 20 years of work, had amply demonstrated the need to promote and carry out research and training activities in specific areas for the purpose of improving the status of women throughout the world.

14. **Ms. Al-Nadari** (Yemen) said that her delegation supported the statement on agenda items 109 and 110 made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China by the representative of Kenya.

15. Her country was making every effort to advance the situation of women and to bring about gender equality. The legislation enacted with a view to strengthening women's position and opening up opportunities had made a significant difference: women had the right to education and to work, and their right to participate in politics was guaranteed by the Constitution.

16. The first five-year plan for economic and social development addressed women's situation and aimed to increase their participation in economic and social activities by increasing the number of female students and reducing the primary school drop-out rate among girls; eradicating illiteracy, in particular amongst girls and women, guaranteeing women the right to work, to equal employment and to training and providing support for women-related projects. Those measures would go a long way towards increasing women's involvement in public life and the decision-making process.

17. The goals of the National Strategy for Women, developed by the National Women's Council and adopted by the Government included eradicating poverty, providing material opportunities for rural and urban women so that they could set up production and commercial cooperatives and strengthening the role of women in the family.

18. Women and development was an important part of the programme of work for the period 1996-2000, which focused on improving women's ability to participate in decision-making at all levels. The programme aimed to achieve equality at all levels while observing the precepts of the Islamic Shariah, to provide family health care and contraception and to extend the provision of social services. A large number of projects and funds had been set up by the Government and by non-governmental organizations with a view to achieving those aims.

19. Her country affirmed its commitment to the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and was giving priority to its objectives. Every effort was being made to strengthen the position of women in the family and in society.

20. **Ms. Yuan Xiaoying** (China) said that it was to be regretted that the critical objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action had yet to be achieved. Indeed, the feminization of poverty had only been exacerbated and the challenges facing the international community were as formidable as ever. The Chinese Government, for its part, had been mainstreaming a gender perspective into all State policies and programmes as part of concerted efforts to honour its commitments and build mechanisms for the advancement of women. The de facto and *de jure* protection of women's interests had been further strengthened.

21. The reform of China had resulted in making women more aware of their equal rights and enhancing their participation, *inter alia*, in the political, economic and social fields. Thanks to long-standing efforts to raise public awareness of legal tools, people now had a better understanding of gender equality and the traditional notion of male superiority was increasingly being discarded. Also on a positive note, women's levels of education had risen and growing numbers were entering an increasing diversity of professions. The proportion of women scientists had increased from 31.6 per cent in 1983 to 38 per cent in 1997 and women's participation in management and decision-making had also grown. Recent industrial structural adjustment had, however, caused some workers, particularly women, to leave their posts. Concerned to protect the right to employment, especially of women workers, the Government had responded by launching a re-employment project.

22. It was the view of the Chinese delegation that the Special Session of the General Assembly on Women should be devoted not to a renegotiation of issues but to a comprehensive appraisal of progress achieved and of factors impeding implementation of the twelve critical areas identified in the Beijing Platform for Action. The Chinese Government remained committed to the early realization of the common goal of equality, development and peace. The newly adopted Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women would prove a valuable tool for protecting women's rights and interests.

23. **Ms. Boyko** (Ukraine) expressed appreciation of the work of the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. Further action was needed on the part of the international community if the rights of women as an integral and indivisible part of human rights were to be fully respected. The Commission on the Status of Women continued to play an essential role in monitoring implementation of the Platform for Action. The full implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women should be prioritized at all levels and the adoption of the Optional Protocol was most welcome.

24. In the Ukraine, the State Committee for Family and Youth Affairs of Ukraine constituted an effective mechanism for studying the social status of women and elaborating policy proposals for implementation at municipal and district levels. The Ukrainian Government had, *inter alia*, adopted as priorities the promotion of women's economic rights, the enhancement of women's participation in government, reproductive health and safe motherhood and the eradication of violence against women, which was a critical area of concern. Trafficking in women and girls was criminalized under Ukrainian law and attempts were currently under way to address the issue at a regional level, with the cooperation of non-governmental organizations. Internationally, the Global Programme against Trafficking in Human Beings elaborated by the Centre for International Crime Prevention and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute had the potential to help the international community better respond to the worldwide problems of smuggling of migrants and trafficking in women.

25. The growing feminization of poverty had recently become a significant problem in countries in transition. Women's poverty was further exacerbated by the persistence of rigid gender stereotypes, by women's limited access to power, education and training and by the growing insecurity of families. Solutions of those problems must incorporate women into the decision-making process and the gender perspective must be mainstreamed in both national and international poverty eradication efforts.

26. The myth that women were incapable of performing complex professional or managerial functions had been abolished and the new distribution of labour between the sexes, whether at home or in the workplace, was making parity democracy a reality.

27. **Ms. Enkhtsetseg** (Mongolia) commented that 1999 had been of particular importance to the promotion of women's human rights. For its part, Mongolia had been among the first to become a party to the CEDAW Convention, welcomed adoption of the Optional Protocol and had been actively cooperating with the Committee in its implementation.

28. Through its national plan of action, Mongolia was working to ensure the equitable participation of women in society. The joint signing with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) of a Memorandum of understanding to economically and politically empower women of Mongolia into the twenty-

first century had laid a solid foundation for partnership with the Fund.

29. Despite progress made by the Government in addressing women's issues, the impact of economic transition had created new obstacles to the achievement of equality. Women had been particularly affected by the disruption of production and social services and had not shared equally in the benefits of privatization. Women also tended to be the first to lose their jobs in both the State and private sectors.

30. The Memorandum of Understanding signed with UNIFEM had identified a number of strategic objectives, including the improvement of national machinery dealing with women's issues to include the participation of non-governmental organizations and local government; the economic empowerment of women; the improvement of the situation of rural women, *inter alia*, through training and access to social and health services; increased participation of women in management and decision-making; the *de jure* and de facto protection of the human rights of women; measures to combat violence against women; improved access of women to information, technology and communications; and support for women's organizations working on a range of issues including alcohol abuse, prostitution, poverty and unemployment. Collaboration with UNIFEM would also involve the development of relevant indicators and capacity-building to mobilize resources and provide market access to women entrepreneurs.

31. Her Government had also collaborated with the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) in the convening of a national training seminar on sex-disaggregated data and the use of statistics and indicators in policy design, which had been the first of its kind in Mongolia. The seminar had succeeded in alerting producers of statistics to the specific needs of the various users. Her delegation wished to support calls for the revitalization of INSTRAW so that it might continue to serve as a primary focal point for research on gender issues.

32. **Ms. Brobbey** (Ghana) said that while much had been achieved in advancing the status of women through the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, discrimination and violence against women and girls persisted. Although several countries had outlawed traditional practices affecting the health of women, those practices still continued, in particular female genital mutilation, which some societies regarded as an initiation rite. After outlawing the practice in 1996 among the few ethnic groups that still upheld it, Ghana had realized that only intensive dissemination of information about the negative impact of that practice on the health of women and girls could guarantee its total elimination. Recourse to court decisions should be a last resort.

33. Ghana urged States which had not yet ratified the Convention to do so without delay and to submit their initial reports as soon as possible so as to demonstrate their commitment to making women and girls full partners in development in the next millennium.

34. Her delegation welcomed the adoption of the Optional Protocol and hoped that it would help curb violence and discrimination against women in their everyday lives. To be effective, however, the Optional Protocol needed to be translated into various languages, and stakeholders, particularly women's advocacy groups, must give it the widest publicity.

35. The progress made in improving the status of women in the United Nations Secretariat still fell short of the goal of attaining 50/50 gender distribution of staff by the year 2000. Member States needed to assist the Secretary-General by encouraging women from their countries to apply for positions in the Secretariat, particularly at the Professional and higher levels.

36. If the international community was to make any impact on the plight of rural women, it must heed the call for equity in international trade regimes and ensure that the process of globalization benefited all countries. That would enable Governments to mobilize adequate resources for the implementation of poverty eradication programmes and the economic empowerment of rural women. Her delegation supported the recommendations in the report on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/54/123) and also the activities of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

37. Her Government had done much to protect women's rights. It had banned traditional practices that affected the health of women or violated their human rights, fixed the marriageable age at 18 years and amended the Criminal Code to ensure the protection of the rights of women and children, and passed a customary and divorce law to provide one standard form of inheritance and to correct injustices suffered by women and children under customary laws.

38. **Mr. Rabola** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that the International Federation was committed to integrating a gender perspective in all its programmes including disaster response, disaster preparedness and the provision of community-based health services.

39. In 1999, the General Assembly of the International Federation would be reviewing a draft policy on gender equality with a view to ensuring that the social differences between men and women were taken into account in all Red Cross and Red Crescent activities worldwide, that all programmes benefited men and women equally and that men and women at all levels had equal input and equal participation. National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies were also encouraged to implement projects to assist special groups of men or women, if local situations so required.

40. As of September 1999, there were more than 50 focal points on gender issues in the national societies and in regional and country delegations; their role was to raise awareness of the importance of considering gender issues in daily work and to apply gender analysis in programming.

41. The International Federation was currently focusing on the identification of good practices to demonstrate how the efficiency of its disaster relief and other programmes could be improved by considering gender issues. In July 1999, the first case study had been published, regarding the experience of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society in recruiting female volunteers in its disaster management programme.

42. The International Federation welcomed the initiative of the United Nations to include gender analysis in humanitarian activities and policies and, in particular, the establishment of a special working group on the subject by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. The International Federation was planning to develop guidelines on how to integrate gender concerns into its natural disaster relief operations and would continue to work closely with United Nations agencies to build on existing efforts.

43. In 1998 the executive management group of the International Federation's secretariat had set up a working group to review the situation of women in the secretariat and in the field; it had found that gender distribution at different levels of the organization was still markedly disproportionate. All hiring managers had been made primarily responsible for achieving a better gender balance in their respective departments, services and delegations. It should be noted, however, that in many parts of the world, women occupied top executive positions in the organization, and also that of the millions of people assisted by the International Federation, a large proportion were women.

44. Ms. Valdivieso (World Bank) said that the World Bank had found that mainstreaming gender was essential not only to lending sectors such as health, education and agriculture and rural development, but also in non-traditional sectors such as infrastructure and finance. In order to strengthen the impact on poverty reduction, it was taking steps to make gender an integral part of the comprehensive development framework, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

45. The World Bank had made substantial progress in bringing gender expertise and perspectives into its institutional structure. Over the past two years, gender policies and programmes had been guided by a Gender Sector Board. Consultations on gender policies and programmes had been institutionalized through the external gender consultative group established in 1996.

46. The World Bank was currently preparing a policy research report on gender and development, which would examine the links between gender, policy and development, and a gender sector strategy paper which would propose institutional and operational priorities for future work.

47. The World Bank had found it highly beneficial to include gender in the policy dialogue with Governments and was increasingly integrating gender into its work on country assistance strategies. In developing a comprehensive development framework, the World Bank had found that the participation of women in strategic consultations could make a major difference in strengthening the agenda, building national ownership and overcoming gender disparities.

48. The World Bank's lending programme reflected continuing attention to gender. In the 1999 fiscal year, there had been significant gender action in two thirds of the operations in population, health and nutrition, and nearly half the operations in agriculture and rural development, social protection and education.

49. The World Bank's partnership with other donors to address women's access to financial services through the consultative group to assist the poor had made substantial progress in assisting microfinance institutions that provided financial services to the poor. In addition, the World Bank was promoting better access to financial services through its regular lending programme.

50. Gender training was becoming increasingly important. The World Bank's Gender Web Page was linked to other key gender sites on the Web, and the newly established *Genderstats* provided indicators on gender and development and sex-disaggregated data for social and economic indicators.

51. The World Bank was making efforts to identify best practice in mainstreaming gender in sector-wide investment and assistance programmes in collaboration with a number of donors. It placed special emphasis on the evaluation of

gender in its activities, and was undertaking an overall evaluation of mainstreaming gender in the work of the Bank and its impact on client countries, to be completed in June 2001.

52. The World Development Report on Poverty and Development, which would appear in 2000, was integrating gender throughout its central analysis, and it was proposed that the World Development Report 2004 should be devoted in its entirety to gender.

53. **The Chairman** announced that with the accession of Tuvalu to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, there were now 164 States parties to the Convention. She hoped that ratification of the Convention would be achieved as soon as possible.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.